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**Testimony of
Leslie J. Gabel-Brett, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Appropriations Committee
Wednesday, February 15, 2006**

H.B. 5007 An Act Making Adjustments to the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2007

Re: Appropriations for the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, Department of Labor, Department of Community and Economic Development and Department of Public Health

Good evening Sen. Harp, Rep. Merrill and members of the Committee. My name is Leslie Gabel-Brett and I am the Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding proposed appropriations for the Department of Labor, Office of Workforce Competitiveness, Department of Community and Economic Development and the Department of Public Health.

Office of Workforce Competitiveness

As you may know, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

has identified job training and economic opportunities for low-income women as a high priority for many years. We have been addressing the persistent causes of family poverty as well as wage inequality for women by promoting programs and policies that provide education, job training, career ladders, entrepreneurship and opportunities to enter higher-wage nontraditional occupations.

With respect to this year's budget proposals, we are pleased to begin with the good news: **We support the budget with respect to continued funding for the Career Ladder Pilot Programs and the Jobs Funnel program** within the Office of Workforce Competitiveness. The PCSW has been co-chairing the Career Ladders Advisory Committee with OWC, and we have initiated several exciting pilots to help low-wage workers in childcare and health care to obtain additional training in their fields in order to increase their skills and earnings. For example, we are excited about the new Allied Health Academy in the Hartford area that will offer a "bridge" for nurses Certified Nurses' Aides to continue their education toward becoming. We are also proud of initiatives to expand education and wage advancement opportunities for workers in the field of early care and education.

The Jobs Funnel program has been very successful in providing job training and placement to city residents. As part of the Hartford Construction Jobs Initiative, the PCSW has run an effective pre-apprenticeship training program for women who wish to enter the skilled trades. This year's program just started last week for fifteen women from the greater Hartford area. These are programs that work, and we urge you to support continued funding for them.

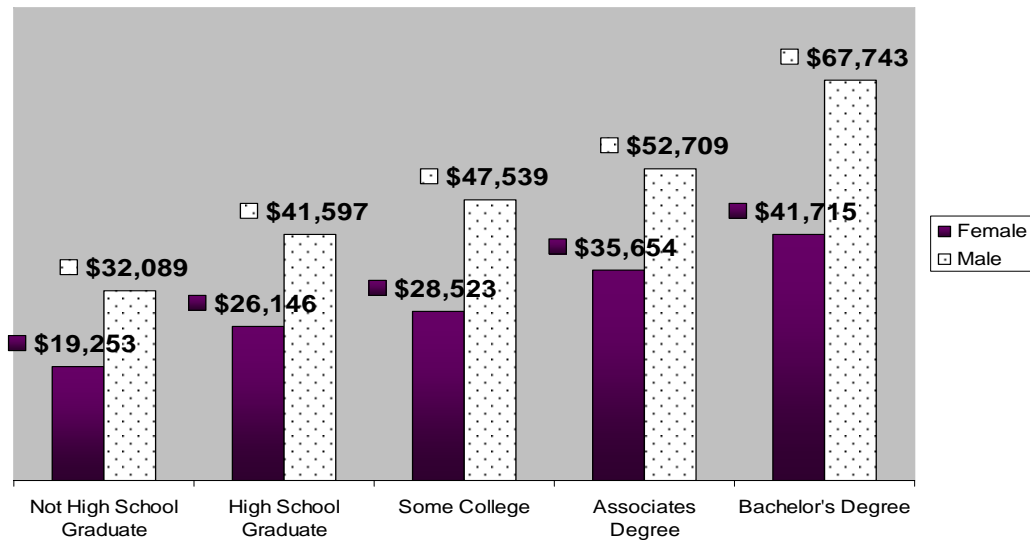
Department of Labor

We strongly recommend increasing the appropriation for the Jobs First Employment Services line by \$3 million to fund a pilot program to provide comprehensive assessments and adult basic education to welfare recipients who lack a high school education. The new funds could be re-allocated from federal TANF funds received by the state but currently used for other purposes. A bill is currently pending in the Higher Education and Workforce Advancement Committee that would establish a two year pilot program to provide basic education, including literacy, numeracy and ESL, completion of high school or a GED, and vocational education programs. We think this is a good investment to increase the employability and earnings of welfare recipients and to help the state meet its federal TANF participation requirements.

We also think this is a sound investment in our state's economy. Businesses across the state need workers with basic skills in reading, numeracy, problem-solving, and specific occupational skills which meet the needs of employers. *Yet more than a third of welfare recipients participating in the Jobs First program have not completed high school.* Only 12% of participants in the Jobs First Employment program have any education beyond high school.¹

The link between education and training and economic success is clear:

¹ *At-A-Squint, Jobs First Employment Services Participants Served by CTWorks, September, 2005*



According to U.S. Census data for Connecticut, the difference between having a high school diploma or equivalent and not having one is worth, on average, \$7,000 per year in wages for women. Obtaining a two-year Associate's degree is worth more than \$9,000 more per year.²

As you know, the State of Connecticut receives \$267 million in federal funds under TANF, and is required to spend \$184 million more in “maintenance of effort” state funds. In other words, a total of \$451 million must be spent on assisting needy families in our state. Of this amount, approximately \$125 million is spent on cash assistance, \$38 million on childcare, and \$16 million on job search and job training. More than \$125 million is spent on a category labeled “Other” in our state reports to the federal government, much of which is allocated to DCF, the State Department of Education, and other state agencies. We are urging you to reallocate \$3 million of these funds to better assist adults on welfare to enter the labor market and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

We also **strongly support the Governor's recommendation to increase funding for the Apprenticeship Program** within the Department of Labor. The funding for this program has been severely reduced in recent years. Apprenticeships are career ladders – a way for entry-level workers to “earn as they learn” a skill and increase their earning capacity. We are very excited about an initiative to expand the new apprenticeship program for child care workers.

Gov. Rell has also proposed \$1.5 million for a “21st Century Jobs Fund” that is described as a matching program for employers who wish to train employees for new technologies or new jobs. In the past, the Department of Labor had a similar program known as “Customized Job Training” that ended when funding was eliminated. The PCSW would welcome any restored funding for job training for workers as long such funding was tied to increased earnings for workers who successfully complete training and as long as any training initiative addresses occupations and skills that will improve

² U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, 2003

the economic status of women in equal measure with men. For example, if the new “21st Century Jobs Fund” focuses on the manufacturing sector, priority should be given to employers who have succeeded in recruiting both women and men and providing career ladders for them.

Department of Community and Economic Development

We support continued funding within the Department of Economic and Community Development for Entrepreneurial Centers, although we respectfully note that the proposed appropriation of \$142,000 is very small, and less than it used to be.

In addition, **we are asking this committee to consider specific funding for services and outreach to “micro-enterprises.”** These very small businesses are a subset of what the state has defined as “small business.” Many of them are women or minority owned, and they represent another pathway to economic self-sufficiency. They need assistance to obtain financing and to be considered when the state is procuring goods and services. Although there are services and set-asides for “small businesses,” these “micro-enterprises” are often dwarfed by small businesses that are defined in our statutes as businesses with as much as \$5 million in sales. DECD already has created regional revolving loan funds for micro-enterprises, but many small business owners are not aware of them, or do not have the time or expertise to utilize them. We recommend special funding for a “micro-enterprise initiative” that includes marketing and coordinating the activities of DECD with the Connecticut Development Authority.

Department of Public Health

We urge the Committee to increase the funding for the Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program by \$1.3 million. As you know, this program combines state and federal funding (from the CDC) to offer free mammograms and pap tests to low-income women who are uninsured or under-insured. This is one of the state’s most successful programs because, through early detection, over 100 women per year are diagnosed with cancer and able to receive treatment before their cancers progress. For example, in 2001, the Department of Public Health reported that 128 women were diagnosed with breast cancer and 100 with cervical cancer. Unfortunately, in recent years, the funds have run out well before the end of the fiscal year, and hospitals and other providers have had to turn women away. The state funding for this program is currently \$1.66 million. By December of this current fiscal year, 85% of the funds had already been expended. We estimate that an annual appropriation of \$3 million will allow the program to serve all eligible women each year.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.